

EDUCATIONAL

IN CHARGE OF
ISABEL HAMPTON ROBB



THE TEACHING OF MASSAGE TO PUPILS IN HOSPITAL TRAINING-SCHOOLS

By HELEN CONKLING BARTLETT

Instructor in Massage Johns Hopkins Hospital Training-School for Nurses and
Graduate of the Training-School

FOR the best understanding of the subject before us, *i.e.*, to what extent and how shall nurses be taught massage? there is first desirable an introductory consideration of the general province of mechano-therapy,—the science of which massage is a part and of which it is popularly often a synonym,—together with something of the training of specialists in this work.

Mechano-therapy, in exact definition massage and medical gymnastics, is a method of healing existent in some form during all history. In approximately the last decade it has undergone radical revision, and through a perhaps exceptionally slow evolution has reached a definite status. It is, in brief, a department of the science of medicine, circumscribed, indeed, but of distinct and acknowledged value. The practice of mechano-therapy, no longer, as in earlier struggles for recognition, performed of necessity by the physician himself, is controlled now by him, but assigned to an assistant.

There continues, of course, much general ignorance and distrust of a therapeutic measure for long almost given over to quackery, and the present work, certainly in America, of both teachers and practitioners, is in many ways still that of the pioneer.

In broad classification there are three systems or schools of mechano-therapy,—Swedish, German, and American. These schools, whatever their inherent minor differences or the diversity of opinion which may be held as to their relative merits, are agreed as to certain necessary qualifications for specialists, without which proficiency is not deemed possible. These are, first, a good touch in massage, *i.e.*, a touch perceptive and efficacious as well as agreeable; second, sufficient theoretical knowledge to detect abnormal conditions and to distinguish between serious and less serious symptoms; and, third, essential alike for normal changes and

for the emergencies of practice, an infinite fund of resources which can only be the result of individual experience. The shortest length of time in which it is possible to reach this standard and to establish a firm foundation in anatomy and kindred subjects is one year of concentrated effort. The importance of this is made greater by the necessity of gaining experience under supervision. Where the training is shorter, much must be left to post-graduate and consequently to optional development. Where it is longer, upon the other hand, it will be found that the curriculum is usually lengthened also, and by branches not strictly imperative, such as an extended course in physical culture, etc.

In returning now to our special subject, the teaching of massage to pupils in hospital training-schools, it should be evident that the course of instruction as above described must be here to a considerable degree curtailed. The two professions, massage and nursing, are parts of a single purpose,—the care of the sick,—but it cannot too forcibly be emphasized that each is a distinct specialty. The points at which they touch, and in which it is important for the nurse to be as carefully trained as in other details of her work, will be later named, but as specialties it is both impracticable and undesirable to attempt to include the one within the other. The duties of each are physically too exacting to combine in practice. The knowledge of anatomy required is more extensive than that necessary for the nurse, and both continuous and concentrated effort are essential to retain as well as to acquire a skilful touch in massage.

A forcible statement of such facts as the above is necessary, for the reason that it is still by no means uncommon to find the practice of massage as a specialty undertaken by nurses upon the insufficient basis of an abridged course of instruction designed for a totally different object. The danger of half-knowledge, always a matter of serious moment, has raised in some minds a strong opposition to other than purely theoretical teaching in massage to pupil nurses, *i.e.*, a series of lectures with demonstration, but strictly without class practice. This method must be objected to because of the many instances in which massage, or, if so designated, *rubbing*, is already distinctly one of a nurse's duties. To make this rubbing an intelligent process, in some degree to extend its scope, and to teach economy of effort is clearly of great importance. This is the object designed in the following suggested course of training. Such a course, it is believed, if its exact province is first firmly established in the minds of the pupil, will occasion none of the difficulties which have been named.

It is, however, by no means easy to define just where the distinction must be placed between the massage of nurse and of specialist. Possibly the most definite rule is to restrict the former to routine work, *i.e.*,

to treatment that has not from time to time to be variously amended, or, in complicated cases, to such treatment as may intervene between the visits of the specialist, and may therefore be supervised and regulated as needed.

As the best safeguard against the ill-effects of partial instruction, it is urged that a broad theoretical stamp be given to the curriculum used, in order to create an appreciation of the whole subject, despite the fact that only the rudiments can be mastered.

The necessary condensation for this purpose is obviously difficult, but in lieu of a text-book at once comprehensive and not too advanced for beginners, much can be done by a careful dictation of essential data, namely, definitions, classification, physiological effects, therapeutic uses and contraindications, while for the rest an outline should be made, of which cursory notes are to be taken and enlarged from memory. Occasional class papers are strongly recommended, as making tangible both the difficulties and the mental grasp of the pupils and as enabling the instructor to meet her class most individually.

Concerning the curriculum from its practical stand-point, there must be also the full scope of work set forth prominently, but more especially it is important that a little be given thoroughly, viz., the groundwork of the fundamental manipulations common to all schools, while development is concentrated along the lines of nursing, *i.e.*, upon the stroking movements, of which all should be given, and upon the simpler and more adaptable manipulations of kneading. There is further necessary some use of passive and resistive exercises, and, from the first, practice in percussion as an aid to suppleness.

In regard to the length of this course of training and its several details, it is first important to secure small classes, or to divide a class into sections, that each nurse may the better receive individual attention. These sections should consist preferably of not more than from ten to twelve pupils, and are, of course, more satisfactorily handled if smaller. To each section from twelve to fifteen lectures or class demonstrations of one hour constitute, it is believed, the best average period to be emphasized, the full course covering approximately from six to eight weeks. A longer course should hardly be necessary if the details of instruction are carefully systematized. A shorter course cannot be sufficiently thorough to be of the desired practical service previously specified.

In the apportionment of class work, one-third of each hour, as a general rule, may be given to theoretical teaching, the remainder to practical work. Until the rudiments are grasped it is best to concentrate the attention of the class upon the work of each nurse in turn, or of two pupils similarly employed, and with current question and comment to

sustain general interest. As the course advances a varied clinic may be developed; by suitable arrangements, cases in both general and local, or surgical, massage, ward and dispensary patients being utilized.

In the interval between classes the treatment of the ward patients may be continued, being assigned in turn to the more proficient pupils, and supervised, as required, by the instructor.

At the end of the course a practical examination should be given, followed later by one upon theory, the final class marking being an average of the two examinations and of the general class-work.

Where the instructor in massage is resident in the hospital, the work of the pupils subsequent to the definitely scheduled course of training may be variously continued in ward or dispensary practice. This is of obvious advantage to the pupil. It differs from a longer course of training in that an extension of the abridged curriculum is not attempted, but solely that the work previously undertaken is more thoroughly grounded.

